

22 November 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: [REDACTED] on Andropov

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[REDACTED] several interesting points about Andropov and about Soviet policy in days to come.

2. [REDACTED] on Andropov:

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Andropov may hold less power than seems apparent. After all, there is a domestic political corollary to the Soviet axiom which holds one is only secure when allies have been turned into stooges--an axiom that in part accounts for the Soviet Union's 1979 activities in Afghanistan. Unlike Brezhnev and Khrushchev before him, Andropov may lack a coterie of high-level party proteges to elevate to the Politburo. His proteges are in the KGB, and are not suitable for Politburo membership. Those who are appointed will likely be allies, which means they will go along with Andropov only up to a point.

Moreover, a sense of political exhaustion in Moscow may take the form of a leave-it-to-Yuri attitude. The Politburo will give Andropov a fair amount of running room for a while, perhaps by making him President. But the votes to stop Andropov will be there, should he go too far.

Thus the appearance that Andropov has taken all of Brezhnev's power may be illusory.

If [REDACTED] defectors are accurate, KGB reporting from the West is of much lower quality than KGB internal reporting. Andropov probably is the top-level official best informed about domestic conditions. But Andropov has never been to the West, and to the extent he's relied on KGB reporting he may be badly misinformed. With the exception of Andrei Gromyko, so are all the other Politburo members. But Andropov may think he's well informed, and this perception could be troublesome.

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3. [REDACTED] on Soviet Policy:

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The arc in which Soviet policy is capable of swinging is quite narrow--no more than five degrees in either direction. Thus one should not anticipate big changes of any sort.

The most likely approach to stopping the domestic economic slide will be whip-cracking--a technique in which Andropov is especially well trained. The improvements possible through well-managed repression could be significant, at least for a while.

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In foreign policy, there is a possibility of some relatively daring movement--of a sort that would appear to suggest a moderation of Soviet behavior. This was indeed the case after Stalin's death. However, the apparent moderation will evaporate after a year or two as the imperatives of Soviet policy assert themselves. The West must be careful not to over-react, and to wait for the long-term trend to re-emerge.

The West should expect a well-calculated gesture or two fairly soon. ["So many people are begging for a signal. If Andropov is half as bright as everyone says, he'll send a bloody signal and tie the West in a knot."] After all, there are a number of symbolic gestures the Soviets could take--e.g., the release of Anatoli Scharansky and/or Sakharov--for which the West has no equivalent. Pressure to respond to such a Soviet gesture will be enormous, and there is a danger that the West will offer a gesture of substance in return for a symbol.

4. Final Thought:

The amount of attention devoted to the notion that Andropov is intellectually smart is utterly ridiculous. There is no connection whatever between a man's intellectual prowess and his abilities as a leader.

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cc: DDI
NIO/USSR-EE